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A group of Flathead Indians standing beside the Ram's Horn Tree. From left to right: Adele Vanderberg Nine Pipe, Harriet Whitworth, Mary Kaiteme, Adeline Finley, Angelic Finley, Chief Martin Charlo, Aeneas Finley, Victor Vanderberg, Rosy Vanderberg, and at ease in the foreground, Louie Pellou. Photograph taken about 1921 and reproduced through the courtesy of H. W. Lord of Darby.



THE RAM'S HORN TREE AND OTHER MEDICINE TREES OF THE FLATHEAD INDIANS

By George F. Weisel, Jr.

On the east bank of the East Fork of the Bitter Root river between the towns of Darby and Sula is a large yellow pine called the Ram's Horn Tree. The United States Forest Service has it marked as such with a placard where highway 93 runs within a few feet of its trunk. Some controversy exists as to whether or not it is the original tree described in Indian legend and in the journals of fur traders. If it is, it is one of the earliest curiosities to be noted in Western Montana. The first written account of a ram's horn tree in this vicinity was made by the fur trader, Alexander Ross. He camped near one on the 11th of March, 1824.¹

In no place of our trip, Hell's Gates itself scarcely excepted, did we meet such a gloomy and suspicious place. At every bend of the river, wild and romantic scenes opened to view; the river alone preventing the hill and cliffs from embracing each other. We had to cross and recross twelve times in half as many miles, until we reached a rocky and slippery path on its margin, where grew a few pine-trees, through which the narrow and intricate path led.

Out of one of the pines I have just mentioned, and about five feet from the ground, is growing up with the tree a ram's head, with the horns still attached to it; and so fixed and embedded is it in the tree, that it must have grown up with it; almost the horn of one of the horns, and more than half of the head is buried in the tree; but most of the other horn, and part of the head protrudes out at least a foot. We examined both, and found the tree scarcely two feet in diameter. Here we put up at an early hour, and called the place Ram's Horn encampment.

Our Flathead Indians related to us a rather strange story about the ram's head. Indian legend relates that one of the first Flathead Indians who passed this way attacked a moun-

¹ Alexander Ross was a chief trader with the Northwest Company and later with the Hudson Bay Company. He was instructed by the latter company to lead a trapping and trading expedition to the Snake country. His outfit — consisting of 54 whites and Indians, 206 traps, 62 guns, 231 horses, and 20 lodges — left the Flathead House in February, 1824. It followed the Clark Fork and Flathead Rivers to the Jocko, crossed the Coriacaen Defile into Hell Gate (Missoula), and proceeded south up the Bitter Root river, see "Journal of Alexander Ross — Snake Country Expedition, 1824," edited by T. C. Elliott, *Ore. Hist. Soc. Quart.*, (Vol. XIV, 1913) 266-388.

tain ram as large and stout as a common horse; that on being wounded, the fierce animal turned round upon his pursuer, who taking shelter behind the tree, the ram came against it with all his force, so that he drove his head through it; but before he could get it extracted again, the Indian killed him, and took off the body, leaving the head as a memento of the adventure. All Indians reverence the celebrated tree, which they say, by the circumstances related, conferred on them the power of mastering and killing all animals; hundreds, therefore, in passing this way sacrifice something as a tribute to the ram's head; and one of the Iroquois, not to incur the displeasure of the god of hunters, hung a bit of tobacco on the horn, to make his hunting propitious.²

Another participant in the fur trade, Warren A. Ferris, passing through the same locale in 1833, noted a ram's horn tree and was impressed enough to write in his journal:

On the east side of the Bitter Root river, there is a singular curiosity, that I had not before observed, because it was situated under some rocky bluffs, almost impassable to horsemen, the proper road being on the west side of the river; it is the horn of an animal, called by hunters, "Bighorn," but denominated by naturalists "Rocky Mountain Sheep"; of a very large size, of which two thirds of its length from the upper end, is entombed in the body of a pine tree, so perfectly solid and firmly, that a heavy blow of an axe did not start it from its place. The tree is unusually large and flourishing, and the horn in it some seven feet above the ground. It appears to be very ancient, and is gradually decomposing on the outside, which has assumed a reddish cast. The date of its existence has been lost in the lapse of ages, and even tradition is silent as to the origin of its remarkable situation. The oldest Indians can give no other account of it, than it was there precisely as at present, before their father's great grandfathers were born. They seldom pass it without leaving some trifling offering, as beads, shells, or other ornaments — tokens of their superstitious veneration of it. As high as they can reach, the bark of the tree is decorated with their trifles.³

Indians invariably conceived legends about any oddity, however slight, and the Ram's Horn Tree certainly did not escape their attention. As compared to the legend narrated in Alexander

² Alexander Ross, *The Fur Hunters of the Far West*, 2 Vols., (London, 1885), II, 18-19.

³ W. A. Ferris, *Life in the Rocky Mountains*, edited by Paul C. Phillips, (Denver, 1940), 232-233. Warren Angus Ferris was employed by the Western Department of the American Fur Company. In 1833 he was with a party trading on Green River, but in July was sent with Robert Newell to resume trade with the Flatheads whom he had visited earlier. On his way down the Bitter Root valley he saw the Ram's Horn Tree. He remained in Western Montana throughout the winter and made his camp in the mountains between Flathead Lake and Plains (*ibid.*, 212-261).

Ross' account, the more recent tales are much embellished. One published in 1901 has the inevitable "Coyote" as hero of the incident, and suggests that more than a single tree was involved.

Coyote took to the trail again, and went up to Medicine Trees between Ross's Hole and Darby. Coyote was going down the mountain-side, and a big Mountain Sheep ran after him. There were big trees standing at the bottom of the mountain.

Coyote ran and the Mountain sheep ran after him. Then all at once Coyote ran out to one side. The Mountain Sheep ran on down the mountain and right into the big trees at the bottom. One of his horns stuck in the side of the big tree. It is up high now and can be seen quite plainly.

Every time the Indians go there, they give earrings or beaded moccasins or anything they happened to have to that horn, because it is big medicine. That is why the trees are called Medicine Trees.⁴

The Indian's story kept growing with the years, undoubtedly their imagination were encouraged by the interest evoked by the whites, until in about 1929 it went like this:

One day while the Coyote was traveling, he accidentally stepped on something which cried out painfully, "Oh, you have broken my leg! I was just about warning you of some danger of which you are almost within reach. But as you have injured me, I will not."

As the Coyote looked down, he saw a poor little lark with a broken leg. "I did not mean it," said the Coyote pitifully, "do not worry, I will heal it for you," so he did so magically. "Well now, listen," said the lark, "a little ways farther on you will hear someone calling you. It is the Mountain Sheep Buck, who kills everyone who goes by, as he is very quick and powerful, and when you meet him you must be very watchful, for he may kill you."

"Thank you," said the Coyote, "I will see if I don't put an end to that wicked beast." And so Coyote went on and a little ways farther he heard someone calling. "Coyote come this way." He went on until he saw the Mountain Sheep Buck coming down to meet him. They both walked up to each other until they were very close together, then they stood watching each other closely. The Buck said in a warning voice, "What right have you to tread over my private land without my consent? Whoever does so,

⁴Louisa McDermott, "Folk-Lore of the Flathead Indians of Idaho: Adventures of Coyote," *J. AM. FOLK-LORE*, (Vol. XIV, 1901) 245. Although the Ram's Horn Tree was merely a curiosity about which the Flatheads had some superstitious veneration, there was a hypothetical tree that evidently played a major role in their religion. One belief held that there was a great tree with roots sunk deep in the earth and branches which reached to the sky. The Good Chief sat on top of the tree, while the Bad Chief sat at the roots within the earth. The Good Chief was the deity who sent the culture hero, Coyote, into the world to make life easier for the people. See J. A. Teit, "The Salishan Tribes of the Western Plateaus," edited by Franz Boas, *Forty-fifth Annual Rept. Bur. Am. Ethnol.*, 1927-1928, 383.

it cost him his life." "Is that so," said the Coyote, "and have you killed many already?" "Certainly," said the Mountain Sheep Buck, "countless numbers of them." "Is that so," said the Coyote, "you must be very powerful." "Certainly I am," said the Mountain Sheep Buck. "Well," said the Coyote, "let me see how powerful you are with those horns. Strike this pine and let me see how deep they will go into it."

During all this time, the Coyote had his eyes pretty close. "All right," said the Mountain Sheep Buck, and suddenly jumped up and struck for it, and struck it way high above the trunk with one of his horns deep into the tree, and before he could get himself off, the Coyote was right there, holding fast to the tree.

The next moment Coyote drew his great flint knife and cut off the head of the Mountain Sheep Buck, and the body dropped to the ground. Then he cut off the head from the horns which were stuck in the tree, then the head dropped to the ground and then he cleaned out the horn and jumped to the ground. He took the head and body and threw them up on the hillside. They splashed on the rocks and they only left a print carved on the rocks — a human face, looking towards the horn stuck in the tree.

After this was all done, the Coyote stood by the tree and said, "In the future generation this tree will be a Medicine Tree to all tribes."⁶

The present-day Flatheads are not able to augment this one, although they have been given the chance to do so. Their legends are essentially the same at that given above.

Another bit of Indian lore demonstrates the powerful medicine of the pine. It seems that a Nez Perce, on his way to buffalo with a party of Flatheads, boastingly demonstrated his scorn of the tree by firing a rifle ball into its trunk. Directly afterwards, while running some buffalo on the plains east of the mountains, his horse fell and he was killed. The Flatheads said it was because the Nez Perce had spoiled his luck by mistreating the Ram's Horn Tree.⁷

Under the sponsorship of Sid Ward, annual celebrations were held around the tree by Indians and whites during September or October of the early 1920's. The whole affair was purely a white mans' innovation. "Thousands of valley people listened to the legend of the Medicine Tree, and to the story of Lewis' and Clark's reception by the Flathead-Salish residents of the Bitter Root. Folks from Missoula to Sula had a fine time."⁸ The celebra-

⁶ From material collected in about 1920 by Mrs. A. J. Gibson, late of Missoula. See also *Folk-tales of Salishan and Sahaptan Tribes*, edited by Franz Boas, (New York, 1917) 117 for another variant of this legend.

⁷ Story from Mr. Sid Ward, currently residing in Missoula.

⁸ The Western News, Hamilton, Mont., Oct. 6, 1949, 3.

tions ceased after Mr. Ward was compelled to discontinue the expense of feeding so large a group of Indians.

Conflicting opinions are held by the white pioneers in the region as to whether or not the true Ram's Horn Tree is the one so marked. Will Cave, a remarkably reliable informant on the early days in the Bitter Root, insists that it is not. He claims that the original was chopped down years ago and the section with the horn sawed out was given to someone in Victor, Montana. Another report has it that the horns were cut from the tree and sent to the Chicago World's Fair. On the other hand, H. W. "Bert" Lord of Darby, a resident of the valley since 1882, insists that the original tree is the one still standing by the highway, and that some vandal had cut off the exposed portion of the horn. Sid Ward, who came to the Bitter Root in '84 or '85, states that he frankly does not know whether or not it is the original. He had heard that early loggers in the valley cut it down, and fearing retaliation by the Indians, had instituted another one. An old sawyer named Billy Rombeaux declared that he and his partner were the ones that felled it.

The Indians, who should know more positively than the whites, say that it is the same medicine tree their ancestors revered. Ellen Big Sam, a full-blood of 71 years, recalls first passing it when she was about eight. Her mother told her to pull out some of her hair and hang it on the trunk, for, by doing so, she would live to an old age. Other squaws in the same party led their children there to make wishes. Ellen has traveled past the tree nearly every year since then. She was taken there last spring to request a particular wish she was anxious to have granted.

There is no doubt that the pine contains the horn of some large mammal. The only external evidence that it might contain the horn, or horns, of a mountain sheep are two scars on the trunk. A few flakes of material chipped from within these scars give a weak protein test when treated chemically, and have a typical odor of burning hair or horn when treated. Microscopically, they have the same appearance as pieces of sheep horn whittled from a skull in the museum of the Montana State University.

The horn was unquestionably placed there years ago by man, and has been completely overgrown. It is still not an uncommon practice for people to hang deer and elk antlers in the crotches or cavities of trees. The opinion that a charging ram drove his horns so firmly into the wood that he could not extricate himself is hardly tenable. The scars are exactly seven feet from the ground, and must have been at this height from the time they

were formed, as the main trunk of a tree does not grow up, it grows only in circumference. Large male sheep may attain six feet in length, and stand forty inches at the shoulder. They do rise on their hind-legs when jousting during the breeding season, sometimes meeting head-on in such a position.¹ But even while rearing, they would barely reach seven feet, and in such a position would hardly have force enough to drive the horns into wood.

Other means by which the ram could have caught his horn at such a height are also ruled out. He could not have leaped off a bank into the tree because the scars are on the north side, almost at right angles to the rising slope to the east, and the rocky bluffs are too far off. The possibility that the ground eroded down several feet, since the implantation of the horn, is hardly possible, as the soil consists mostly of decomposed granite which does not wash out easily, and the base of the tree itself gives no such indication. The ram may have stood on several feet of hard-packed snow, but that is unlikely as the surrounding country lacks browse plants suitable for a wintering ground where the snow becomes packed by numerous animals in a relatively small area.

The age of this pine makes it possible for it to be the true tree. It is between 300 and 340 years old. The trunk has some internal rot which makes it impossible to get an accurate determination with increment bore, but, besides a bore from the tree itself, the age was checked on yellow pine of similar diameter growing on the same slope, and by counting annual rings on neighboring stumps. To clamp an average sized sheep's horn about the trunk of a tree would require a trunk with a diameter of close to eight inches. Counting back on the annual rings of the bore, the tree would have been fifty years old at this diameter.

Quite probably, the pine presently called the Ram's Horn Tree is the same as that described by Ferris in 1833. The height of the scars coincide with his description, and as he mentioned, it is situated under some rocky bluffs directly across the river from a small flat where the original trail probably went. The horn would have been in the tree for approximately 150 years when he saw it 118 years ago. He stated that it had been there for a long time.

From Ross's statement, it is not possible to fix so exactly the location of the tree he saw. However, it was along the East Fork

¹ See H. E. Anthony, *Field Book of North American Mammals*, (New York, 1938), 543; and C. C. Spencer, "Notes of the Life History of Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep in the Tarryall Mountains of Colorado." *J. Mammalogy*, (Vol. XXIV, 1943), 3-4.

of the Bitter Root where the valley was very narrow, so must have been within a mile or so of the tree in question. It is unlikely that his horn-tree was the same as that described by Ferris, although it was in the same locality. Ross's comments on the curiosity do not jibe with those of Ferris, although both these men were accurate observers, trained by the school of necessity. The Ross tree had a skull with horns embedded rather than a single horn, and it was only five feet above the ground.⁹

Supporting the contention that Ross's and Ferris's trees were not identical is the fact that ram's horn trees were not uncommon. In the Hell Gate Trading Post, Missoula, there are two sections of trees, each of which contains the horn of a mountain sheep. One is a portion of a large fir that came from the Jocko. A horn is completely entombed in its trunk. The Walter Custer family, which runs the unusual trading establishment, remembers that it was venerated by the Indians, and that even at the time it was cut down about thirty years ago, there were beads and trinkets at its base. The other is a section of a tamarack which has only partly grown around a horn. The Custers do not recall where this one came from.

Ernest Thompson Seton recorded two more horn-trees, and added further information to the subject.

It seems that at one time, it was the custom of the Indians to hang Sheep horns on trees — to mark the spot — to make a kind of monument. I remember hearing a tradition that the hunting grounds of the Blackfeet were demarcated from those of the Shoshones by a "horn-tree."

Two such trees have been cut down, and the embedded horns added to collections of the curious. A picture of one appears in **Forest and Stream** for April 11, 1896, with this notice:

"I send you photos of a Big-horn head embedded in a large green, quaking-asp tree, found on Porcupine Creek—tributary of upper West Gallatin River — Gallatin County, Mont. The tree was near a rocky ledge or wall. As you will notice in the photo, the skull is completely embedded." (Aug. Gottschalck, Bozeman, Mont.)

On Jan. 28, 1914, I saw in the store of J. P. Evans of Livingston, Mont., a horn-tree with two pairs of ram's horns embedded in the wood.¹⁰

⁹ There must be a misprint in T. C. Elliott's, *op. cit.*, 374, which places the Ram's Horn Tree in "Sec. 22, Tp. 30 N., R. 20 E., B. M." This would be a good many miles from the route traveled by Ross. The present tree is in Sec. 22, Tp. 2 N., R. 20 E.

¹⁰ E. T. Seton, **Lives of Game Animals, Hoofed Animals**, 4 Vols., (New York, 1827), III, 529. See page 543 of this volume for sketches of the two horn-trees mentioned above.

Ellen Big Sam asserts that there is a ram's horn tree not far north of Arlee which is used in the Indian Bluejay rites. The Bluejay dancers first hold their ceremonies around a small fir decorated with various trinkets. After the dance, the fir is tied to the horn-tree, where it is left to wilt and the ornaments to fall to the ground.

There were other medicine trees in the Flathead country that were apparently not ram's horn trees. One was about five miles south of Ravalli; and the Salish have this legend connected with it:

Well, this side of the road [west] across the river there is an old road that is just to a pasture, a big pine there which the Indians used as a place for making their wish — like a wishing well or something like that. Whenever the Indians come through there on their way to the hunting grounds back east or any where — that is where they make their wish — shoot arrows over there on up the tree. Long ago you could see hundreds of arrows sticking on the tree. Later the arrows dropped off, dropped until no arrows left.

Some years ago I found out after the reservation thrown open, that there was a fellow who lived around that district, kind of an old fellow — a white fellow cut the tree down — cut it up into blocks. Year or two after that, that old fellow passed away. He [I] think he passed away because he cut the tree down — brings the fellow bad luck.

They always do — whenever Indians going down the river make their wish — throw some arrows on the tree whenever they pass by coming back just as they do with the medicine tree."

Another sacred tree stood on Medicine Tree Hill near the old McCarty bridge on Hell Gate river. It formed the southwest corner for the survey in 1883 which marked the boundaries between what then constituted Deer Lodge and Missoula Counties.¹¹ This one also had its own legend.

Many years ago a young Indian, while slowly ascending a hill, discovered that he was being pursued by his enemies. Requiring rest he sought a secluded spot where he hung his medicine talisman on the limb of a tree, under the soothing shade of which he soon fell asleep and from which he was suddenly awakened by the the yells of his enemies who, discovering his position, began making him the target of their arrows. To the young Indian's surprise not an arrow touched his body, all seemed to veer off and fly into space before reaching him. This occasioned great surprise on his part, as he was entirely sur-

¹¹ Story by Baptiste Finley, a full-blood Indian 79 years old. **Full Blood Flathead Indian Montana Study Group**, printed in mimeograph form by the Montana Study, Univ. Mont., Missoula, Mont., April 30, 1947.

¹² M. A. Leeson, **History of Montana**, 1739-1885, (Chicago, 1885), 552.

rounded, and being encouraged by the belief that he was being protected by his "medicine" he quickly replied to the enemies' arrows by those from his own bow and was gratified to see that every arrow found its mark, resulting in the killing of many of his foes. His quiver soon became entirely exhausted of its stock of arrows when behold! as by magic, more came to his hand enabling him to continue his battle against great odds in numbers.

One Indian, observing the great slaughter going on among his friends, and believing that the young Indian's "Medicine" was strong and its power saving him from harm, became desperate and seeing the medicine talisman hanging on the tree over the young Indian's head made a dash for the tree and snatching the "Medicine" from the limb threw it away. The very next arrow aimed at the single-handed warrior reached a vital spot and he sank to earth to rise no more.

This legend is still current among the Indians of the western slope who never pass the tree without hanging some article from their personal effects upon one of the limbs as a token of awe from their superstitious natures and to keep green the memory of the medicine-wrought tragedy enacted beneath its shade and to the present day the eminence is known as "Medicine Tree Hill."¹⁸

Until some irresponsible boys cut it down in 1949, Sentinel Pine, which grew on the west slope of Mount Jumbo, was a familiar sight to the residents of Missoula. It was not considered a true medicine tree by the Salish, but it was supposed to bring good luck. When the Indians held horse races and stick games in Hell Gate Ronde, losers would climb the hillside to Sentinel Pine and pray for luck. The tree told them how to win. Sometimes a gambler would have to remain on the slope of Jumbo for a week before he received a sign from the tree.¹⁹

These last three medicine trees mentioned have been cut down or their identity lost. The only remaining monument of this sort in the land of the Flatheads is the Ram's Horn Tree. In the light of this present investigation, there would seem to be little doubt as to its validity. Whites have maintained a mildly superstitious veneration of the tree by driving pennies into its bark. Unfortunately, others have started to carve their initials into its trunk. May the spirit of the tree visit them with misfortune. As the curiosity dates back at least 118 years in historical record, and more than that in Indian legend, it should be carefully preserved.

¹⁸ Caleb E. Irvine, "Medicine Tree Hill," from notes edited by William F. Wheeler, *Hist. Soc. Mont.*, (Vol. VI, 1907) 482-483.

¹⁹ Story by Ellen Big Sam, Arlee, Mont., interpreted by Joe Big Sam Woodcock.



EARLY TERRITORIAL MONTANA: A PROBLEM IN COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION

By Robert G. Athearn

The Montana scene, in the immediate post-Civil War years, presented the federal government with a number of complicated administrative problems. One of these was the relationship between the Indians and the officials of the territory.

While the white residents looked to the central government for protection they often complained that their sponsor was not doing a satisfactory job in containing the Indians and territorial officials received frequent complaints about the lackadaisical policy being followed. The Indians were resentful of the constant encroachment on their lands and having little or no conception of land ownership they often did not feel that they had given up physical possession by treaty. Misunderstandings and misinterpretations led to conflicts between them and the whites with the latter protesting loudly about their rights as American citizens and demanding protection from the army. Real complications arose when territorial officials, who frequently looked forward to the time of statehood with the realization that popularity might mean election to office, were inclined to act precipitously in answer to local clamor for protection.

The best example of political ambition and officious interference in Federal-Indian relations in Montana history can be found in the regimes of Thomas Francis Meagher, acting governor, and Green Clay Smith, governor, in the years 1865 to 1868. Meagher, a former Brigadier General in the Union army, became Secretary to the territory on August 4, 1865. When he arrived at Bannack toward the end of September he was greeted by Governor Sidney Edgerton "who was eagerly awaiting me, as he had made arrangements and was fully prepared to start with his family for the States."¹ This was news which suited the newcomer for he had already informed a friend close to the President that he wanted a governorship because he felt that it might eventually

¹ Letter from Meagher to President Johnson from Virginia City, January 20, 1866. Johnson Papers, Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress.

mean election to Congress.² Now, as acting governor, he was one step closer to his goal and both he and his wife began to implore the President for a permanent appointment.

The departure of Edgerton not only left the gubernatorial reins in Meagher's hands but also made him Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the territory. For this latter assignment to fall into the hands of a man who probably had never seen a western Indian before and one who had delusions of military grandeur was a development not calculated to cause peaceful relations with the first residents of Montana. Within weeks after his arrival Meagher wrote to Major-General Wheaton at Fort Laramie,³ to Major-General W. T. Sherman at St. Louis,⁴ and to Secretary of State Seward,⁵ asking for troops for the protection of Montana against Indians. About the same time he expressed his opinion concerning the care and handling of Indians to the Commissioner of Indian affairs. "As for the Sioux and their allies and accomplices, it is my clear and positive conviction that they will never be reduced to friendly and reliable relations with the whites but by the strong and crushing hand of the military power of the nation."⁶ This conclusion was reached about a month after he had met Indians in council for the first time. His anxiety to make the Indians "friendly and reliable" by crushing them was soon to lead to the biggest military fiasco in Montana territorial history: the organization of Meagher's volunteers.

Meanwhile, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, to whom the above-mentioned advice had been tendered, was becoming rapidly aware of the problems being created by the politically ambitious acting Governor. In a letter to the Secretary of the Interior, he

² "Next to a Military Command this is precisely what would suit me best. . . . It would enable me, after a little, to enter Congress; and once there, I have no fear but that I should make myself Master of the Situation — to my own credit, to the gratification of my friends, to the confusion and mortification of my enemies, and to the honour of my race." Letter from T. F. Meagher to Major James O'Beirne from New York, April 30, 1865. "Some Letters of General T. F. Meagher," *The Journal of the American Irish Historical Society* (1932) XXX, 85-86.

³ Meagher to Major-General F. Wheaton, October 20, 1865, *Territorial Papers of Montana*, I, Department of State Archives, National Archives.

⁴ Meagher to W. T. Sherman, December 16, 1865. *Records of the Department of the Missouri*, File M25DMo. Vol. II, 1866, War Records Division, National Archives.

⁵ Meagher to W. H. Seward, December 11, 1865, *Territorial Papers of Montana*, I, Department of State Archives, National Archives.

⁶ Report by Meagher, December 14, 1865, *Report of the Committee of Indian Affairs*, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, 1866. *House Exec. Doc.* No. 1, 39 Cong., 2 Sess.

discussed Governor Edgerton's absence from Montana and said: "It is true that, since the Governor's departure events have occurred, according to public reports, in which it would appear that the acting Governor has not acted prudently towards the Indians, and which may result in large expense to the Government."¹

Actually the only hope Meagher had was that there would be some difficulty with the Indians. His previous administrative experience was limited to that which he had gained in the Union army. Politically he was a renegade Democrat who had traded allegiances during the war to curry favor with the Lincoln administration and he was not now in favor with either party. Although he had gained some fame, militarily, during the war, he was not liked by the regular army officers in high stations. Added to this, during his stay in America the Irish refugee had never found anything but a temporary success and for him Montana was the last hope. He was desperately determined to do something which would bring commendation from someone in authority. He was convinced that military command was his **forte** and the Indian situation in Montana seemed to be a good place to practice his trade.

During the year 1866 nothing transpired which suggested that he would be considered for any permanent position in Montana. In October, 1866, Green Clay Smith, who had been appointed governor to succeed Edgerton, arrived at Virginia City to assume his duties. However, early in 1867 Smith took a leave of absence and returned to "the States," as the eastern part of the United States was called in Montana. Meagher once again took hope. Coupled with the fact that Smith's absence again put him at the head of the territorial government, there was the prospect of Indian trouble in the Gallatin valley. Rumor had it that Red Cloud and his Sioux would sweep the whites from that region when spring came and there was considerable apprehension on the part of the valley's residents.

In April of 1867, the acting Governor was presented with his opportunity. John Bozeman and Thomas Cover were accosted by Indians while en route to a government fort to procure a contract for the sale of some flour and Bozeman was killed. Cover, who was slightly wounded, returned to the Gallatin valley with a tale of murder at the hands of the Indians. As a resident of Helena disgustedly wrote, "And now the cry is War to the Knife.

¹ D. N. Cooley to James Harlan, Secretary of the Interior, April 10, 1866. Territorial Papers of Montana, I, Department of State Archives, National Archives.

The most that possibly can be made out of all this cry about Indians is, that two men foolishly start to travel through an Indian country without any protection, and meet with the fate before mentioned. There is a bare possibility that the Indians might come to the Gallatin Valley, but the prospects or evidences up to this time certainly do not warrant the warlike movements that are being made by our officials.⁹

The warlike movements mentioned by the writer were coming principally from Thomas Francis Meagher, known locally as "the Acting One." On April 24, in response to the excitement arising out of Bozeman's murder, he called a war meeting in Helena. He told a group of excited miners that there was no militia in the Territory and that any military action had to be spontaneous and voluntary. According to a local newspaper he dramatically related that "The passes of the mountains were the ramparts of Montana; blood had been shed, life sacrificed; the exigencies of the case demanded action, and he, for one, would leave immediately for the threatened quarter, with whoever would bear him company."¹⁰ He called for six hundred volunteers that night and before long Montana had an "army" of its own, bent on saving the territory.

Not everyone looked with enthusiasm upon Meagher's efforts to reduce the Indians "to friendly and reliable relations with the whites." A. H. Chapman, an Indian Agent from Montana, denounced the proceedings vehemently.

Acting Governor Meagher's Indian war in Montana is the biggest humbug of the age, got up to advance his political interest, and to enable a lot of bummers who surround and hang onto him to make a big raid on the United States treasury. . . . When volunteers are sent out and told by their commander, as General Meagher told those under his command in a general order that they shall have all the property they capture, such as robes, horses, etc., it would be strange indeed if they did not create unnecessary trouble with the Indians.¹⁰

Men like Chapman, representing the Indians' and government's side of the picture, were not the only ones who thought they had the acting Governor pegged. Old acquaintances in New York also knew him well. The **New York Herald** sarcastically editorialized upon his latest exploit and condemned his action.

It is an ill wind that blows no good. Even so apparently profitless an undertaking as the Indian war forms no exception

⁹ G. (?) W. Nowland to W. T. Sherman from Helena, Montana, May 14, 1867. Adjutant General's Office, File No. 789M1867.

¹⁰ **The Montana Post**, April 27, 1867.

¹⁰ Report of A. H. Chapman, Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior, 1867. **House Exec. Docs.**, 40 Cong., 2 Sess., 259,260.

to the rule. For the last two years General Meagher has been lost to public view in the wilds of Montana. He might as well have been bodily interred, only that he left himself the chance of a resurrection. This now offers itself in the Indian war, which the people of Montana undertake to quell on their own account. Meagher originated the movement, and if any can carry it to a successful issue he is the man. He is as good at a palaver as at a fight, and his eloquence is just of the character to suit the Indians. He will quiet them by talking their heads off — a much less costly and more humane process than that of exterminating them. We wish the General had been pressed into the service sooner. His figures of speech might have saved as many figures of expenditure.¹¹

Officials of the regular army agreed with such editorial sentiment. General Sherman, at St. Louis, had long known the famed Irish exile and was fully aware of his emotional characteristics. When Sherman had been assigned the task of herding a mob of men, called soldiers, along the way toward Bull Run those July days in 1861, Thomas Francis Meagher had been a Captain in the 69th Regiment, New York State Militia, and was a subordinate of Sherman's. Dissatisfied with the way his superior was carrying out his duties, Meagher had written a scathing newspaper article wherein he called him a "rude and envenomed martinet." Now, in 1867, Sherman was charged with keeping peace in the vast military division of the Missouri and his old detractor was up in far-away Montana trying his best to start a war. "Meagher, in Montana, is a stampeder, and can always with a fair show of truth raise a clamor, and would have in pay the maximum number of men allowed," Sherman wrote to Secretary of War Stanton. "I have talked with Governor Green Clay Smith, now here en route to Montana and we agree that General Meagher is liable to stampedes, that the dangers that beset Montana are the necessary incidents to its remote position. . . ."¹²

Despite all complaints from outside, the acting Governor proceeded with his war. He called for volunteers who were slow to respond to the Governor's call. On July 1, while at Fort Benton to receive a shipment of guns from St. Louis, Meagher fell from a deck of a river steamer and was drowned. Green Clay Smith, who returned to Montana in June, now assumed leadership of the volunteers and on July 31 called for eight hundred men to serve in a reorganized volunteer militia for a period of six months. Response to this call was greater than the earlier one

¹¹ The New York Herald, May 29, 1867.

¹² Sherman to Stanton, May 4, 1867. Adjutant General's Office, File No. 286W1867, War Records Division, National Archives.

primarily because of a large number of miners in the territory who were worried about getting through the coming winter and were looking for a grubstake.

If Montanans wanted excitement and military adventure they were not to be disappointed in the new governor. If those who did not like Meagher expected anything better in him they did not find it. Smith's volunteers had no engagements with any force of Indians, but merely continued the patrol activities initiated by Meagher. The "bummers" who had surrounded the acting Governor clustered around the appointed Governor, availing themselves of all the supplies they could get and using the "Indian scare" as an excuse to look around for new gold prospecting locations. A reporter calling himself "Argent" wrote that in the Yellowstone region gold valued at eight to ten cents a pan was being found, and added, significantly, "The whole country down there looks like an excellent mining country. Therefore let us rally at once and clean the red skins out."¹³ This frank statement characterized the thinking of the volunteers.

Toward the end of September, General Alfred Terry issued instructions to Governor Smith to the effect that all volunteers would be mustered out at once and the regular army would take over. This did not meet with the approval of the men who had hoped to camp on the Yellowstone during the winter, at territorial expense, and instead of turning in their equipment they took all the supplies they could lay hands on, including horses, and proceeded down the river hunting for gold. Thus ended the "Indian war" of 1867.¹⁴

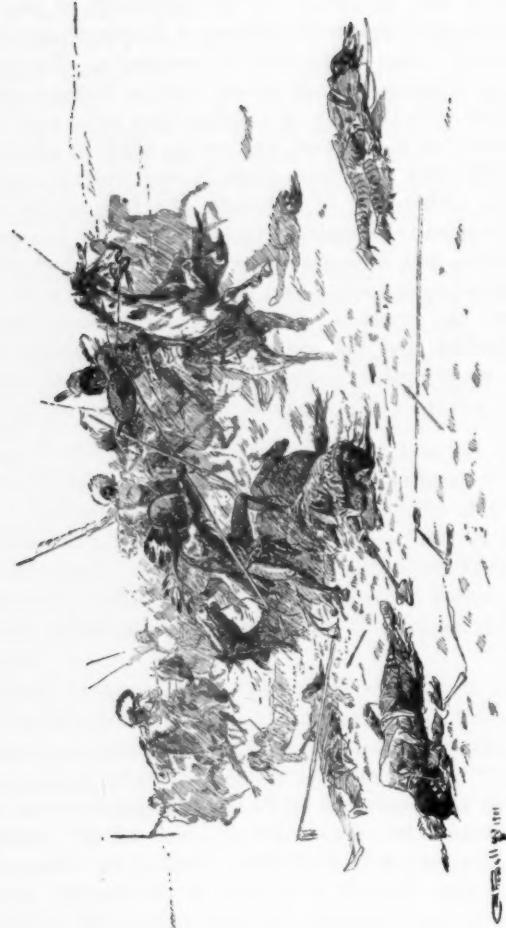
Territorial Montana, from the autumn of 1865 to the end of 1867 is an excellent case study of complications in Federal-Territorial relations arising out of remoteness, lack of communication, and the impotence of the regular army whose assignment it was to protect the far-flung holdings of the government in the western United States. In this instance the Indians were used as an excuse to promote the political ambitions of a disappointed Civil War general (Meagher), as well as to furnish employment for a lot of miners who found that the diggings were beginning to play out. The result was that the major Indian tribes in the area were made more restive, the job of the regular army was further complicated, and the federal government paid a half mil-

¹³ The *Montana Post*, August 31, 1867.

¹⁴ For a more complete account of the military aspects of the organization, see Robert G. Athearn, "The Montana Volunteers of 1867," *The Pacific Historical Review*, XIX (May, 1950), 127-137.

lion dollars for the services of volunteers who were trying to promote a war.

It was true in Montana, as it was also true in other frontier communities, that when business was bad and mining income lagged, there was an upturn in the patriotism of the residents who seemed a good deal more anxious to do something about "the Indian menace" than in the times of prosperity. The case of the Indians was hopeless. Faced on one side by Federal troops who were charged with the duty of keeping open more and more lines of communication in the west, and on the other by citizen organizations which were sometimes given to such outrages as that perpetrated by Chivington in Colorado, the fate of the vanishing American seemed to be sealed. The Montana story was not unique, by any means, but it seems to have been furnished with every administrative complication that the history of any sister territory in the west can produce. The triangular relationship between resident, Indian, and the central government, simply presented one of the many problems which faced official Washington in its struggle to govern fairly a population island out on its far-flung frontier.



VARIATIONS ON A MINOR THEME**Some Controversial Problems of the Custer Fight****By Edgar I. Stewart**

The Battle of the Little Big Horn River, fought seventy-five years ago and variously known as "Custer's Last Stand" and "The Custer Massacre," has the undoubted distinction of being one of the most controversial battles in American military annals. Although judged by present-day standards it was not a great battle and it certainly was not a decisive one, there is so much uncertainty as to what actually took place that it continues after a lapse of three-quarters of a century to fascinate historian and novelist alike. It almost seems that the blood shed on that historic 25th of June, 1876 has been exceeded many times over by the ink spilled from the pens of writers who have attempted to describe or to explain what happened on those sage-brush covered ridges above the Little Big Horn.

Many factors have contributed to the controversy. A great deal of the argument, although by no means all, is directly traceable to the character and personality of George A. Custer himself, and to the related fact that in 1876 the Seventh Cavalry, of which he had been the Lieutenant-Colonel and the real commanding officer ever since its activation ten years before, had in that interval acquired a reputation as the most efficient mounted regiment in the army. But in those turbulent and tempestuous ten years, internal quarrels and squabbles had developed until by May of 1876, the regiment was divided into two mutually hostile factions, which, at the risk of over-simplification may be designated as the pro and anti-Custer factions. For this development Custer must assume a large share of the responsibility. Of undoubtedly ability but vain and egotistical, he won either admiration or violent dislike, and since there were few officers of the regiment who attempted to stay out of regimental politics and to avoid being drawn into the controversy in any way, most of them were either ardent admirers or bitter detractors of their commander. Thus when Custer and his immediate command were annihilated by the hostile Sioux and Cheyenne tribesmen it was only natural that the survivors, who had been with the commands of Major Marcus A. Reno and Captain Frederick W. Benteen, should seek to extenuate and to excuse, to rationalize and to shift the blame

for the disaster to shoulders other than their own. But if Custer had his detractors he also had his defenders; attack was often met with attack and few if any charges were allowed to go unanswered. The result is that there are few details of the battle upon which there is any agreement, and nearly everything concerning the disaster is the subject of controversy. Although it is of no importance whatever, there is even disagreement as to the number of mules in the pack-train that served the command. Lieutenant E. G. Mathey who was in charge of the train, put the number of mules at one hundred sixty,¹ while B. F. Churchill, one of the civilian packers, said there were one hundred seventy-five.²

It is not the intention of the present writer to enter into a discussion of some of the better-known subjects of dispute such as whether Custer disobeyed the orders of General Terry, the number of Indians in the hostile camps or whether Major Marcus A. Reno was guilty of cowardice and dereliction of duty that contributed to Custer's defeat and death. These will be left for another time and place, although it is safe to say that none of them will probably ever be resolved to the satisfaction of all students of the battle. It is the intention rather to discuss, without hoping for a definite conclusion, some of the lesser known controversies regarding the battle, details which contributed to making it the item of American folk-lore that it has become.

At about two o'clock on the afternoon of the 25th, the regiment, which had been following present day Reno Creek down the western slope of the Wolf or Little Chetish Mountains, came to the site of an abandoned Indian camp where one or more Indian burial tepees were standing. Although generally referred to as the Lone Warrior Tepee, or simply the Lone Tepee, there is some evidence to indicate that there may have been more than one funeral lodge. Lieutenant Charles A. Varnum said that there was one tepee and part of another,³ while Captain Myles Moylan referred to it as a couple of abandoned tepees.⁴ The point is of no importance for the subsequent battle but it illustrates how intelligent and honest men can look at the same thing and manage to see something different.

¹ "Proceedings of a Court of Inquiry in the Case of Major Marcus A. Reno Concerning His Conduct at the Battle of the Little Big Horn River, June 25-26, 1876." General Court-Martial Number Q. Q. 979. (Hereinafter cited as O.T.) (Lieutenant Mathey's testimony) 927.

² O.T. (Churchill) 814.

³ O.T. (Varnum) 232.

⁴ O.T. (Moylan) 301.

Here some hostile Indians were seen and Custer ordered his Indian scouts after them. The scouts refused to go, so Custer told Lieutenant William W. Cooke, the Adjutant, to order Major Reno to take his three companies, A, G and M, and pursue the fleeing hostiles and attempt to bring them to battle. In compliance, the Major led his troops toward the river at what Lieutenant George Wallace described as a gallop,⁵ the scout, George Herendeen, as a "steady gallop,"⁶ Lieutenant Luther Hare as a "fast trot,"⁷ and Lieutenant Charles DeRadio as a trot.⁸ Dr. H. R. Porter, who was a civilian contract surgeon, apparently tried to keep on both sides at once since he said that the gait was a trot with some of the horses galloping.⁹

As to how far it was from the Lone Tepee to the river, there was even greater disagreement among the men who rode behind the Major and most of whom were experienced cavalrymen. Lieutenant Hare said it was about five miles,¹⁰ while Lieutenant DeRadio said "four or five miles"¹¹ with which Lieutenant Edward Godfrey's estimate, made later since he was with Benteen's detachment, agreed.¹² Captain Moylan put it between three and three and a half miles,¹³ while Dr. Porter thought that it was not over a mile and a half.¹⁴ Lieutenant Varnum put the distance at "about a mile"¹⁵ but he may have been referring to the distance to the river from where he joined Reno's battalion which was after that battalion had passed the Lone Tepee. Edward Davern, a trooper who was serving as Reno's orderly thought that the distance was between a mile and a half and two miles,¹⁶ while Sergeant F. A. Culbertson of Troop A said that it was only three-fourths of a mile.¹⁷ The scout, Herendeen, told the Reno Court of Inquiry that it was three-fourths of a mile,¹⁸ although on an earlier occasion he had put the distance at three miles.¹⁹ Actually the Lone Tepee stood at the junetion of the South and Middle Forks of Reno Creek, that is one thing in regard to this controversial

⁵O.T. (Wallace) 64.

⁶Army and Navy Journal, July 15, 1876.

⁷O.T. (Hare) 335.

⁸O.T. (DeRadio) 424.

⁹O.T. (Porter) 263.

¹⁰O.T. (Hare) 355.

¹¹O.T. (DeRadio) 423.

¹²O.T. (Godfrey) 849.

¹³O.T. (Moylan) 301.

¹⁴O.T. (Porter) 263.

¹⁵O.T. (Varnum) 232.

¹⁶O.T. (Davern) 480.

¹⁷O.T. (Culbertson) 559.

¹⁸O.T. (Herendeen) 318.

¹⁹Army and Navy Journal, July 15, 1876.

battle of which we are fairly certain, and that junction is approximately four and a half miles from where Reno Creek joins the Little Big Horn.

Another disputed point in reference to this same general subject concerns the number of men in Reno's battalion. Reno himself said that it was one hundred and twelve and declared that he was positive because as he rode toward the river he ordered the company commanders to report the number of men they had in the saddle,²⁰ and in his summation to the Reno Court of Inquiry, Mr. Lyman D. Gilbert, the Major's counsel, clarified the point by saying that there were one hundred and twelve men not counting the Indian scouts or the non-combatants.²¹ Reno added that he thought there were twenty-four or twenty-five scouts who crossed with him but that they took an abrupt departure soon after the firing started,²² all of them, with the exception of three or four, running away, not to be seen again until the regiment reached the base camp on the Powder River.²³ Lieutenant Wallace supported the Major, putting the number of men at between one hundred and twelve and one hundred and fifteen including the Indian scouts.²⁴ But skeptics have expressed doubt as to the accuracy of the Major's statistics and some have even gone so far as to express the belief that they were deliberately understated. Reno himself cast some doubt upon the accuracy of his own statements when he testified, in another connection, that "he supposed" Troop G had about forty men.²⁵ Since Captain Moylan testified that he took thirty-eight men into the fight²⁶ this would mean that Troop M had only thirty-four members which is hardly probable. In a letter of General Thomas L. Rosser, dated July 30, 1876, Reno said that his command consisted of one hundred and twenty officers and men and about twenty-five scouts and guards²⁷ for a total of one hundred and forty-five. This is probably closer to the truth although the number of officers and men is certainly understated while that of the scouts and guards is exaggerated.

²⁰ O.T. (Reno) 1096.

²¹ O.T. (Gilbert) 1123.

²² O.T. (Reno) 1096.

²³ O.T. (Reno) 1051.

²⁴ O.T. (Wallace) 85.

²⁵ O.T. (Reno) 1055.

²⁶ "Reno Court of Inquiry: Stenographic Reports of the Testimony, Editorial and Miscellaneous Articles from the Chicago *Times*, January 14 to February 15, 1879." In the William J. Ghent Papers in the Library of Congress. Hereinafter cited as *Court*. (Captain Moylan's testimony) 355.

²⁷ *New York Herald*, August 8, 1876.

Lieutenant Wallace, who had said that there were about one hundred and fifteen men including the scouts, gave considerable ammunition to Reno's critics when he testified that there were twenty-two scouts²² which would mean that Reno had only about ninety-three troopers in his battalion, a figure which is preposterous. Just how preposterous is apparent from another statement that Reno's command moved downstream in a column of twos, about twenty files to the company,²³ or about forty men. Lieutenant Edward S. Godfrey, who in later years made a very detailed study of that battle, says that after examining the muster rolls of the regiment, he concluded that Reno had one hundred and forty men.²⁴ Independent study of these muster rolls indicates, however, that the aggregate strength of the three companies was one hundred and forty-six exclusive of officers. Of these, probably seven men from each troop and possibly more, were on duty with the pack train. Subtracting these twenty-one leaves one hundred and twenty-five men plus eight officers and two surgeons. Probably eight of the Ree scouts and two of the Crows crossed with Reno and took part in the subsequent fighting. In addition there were two white scouts, Charley Reynolds and George Herendeen, the interpreters Girard and Isaiah Dorman, and the two Jackson brothers who were half-breed Pikunis. This gives a grand total of one hundred and fifty-one. Also there were some men from other companies who were temporarily attached to Reno's battalion. Thus both McIlhargy and John Mitchell who were used by Reno as messengers to Custer, were members of Troop I. Edward Davern, Reno's orderly, was a member of Troop F. And both Troops I and F were with Custer. There may have been others since there was considerable shifting of personnel between companies. Theodore Goldin, who later claimed to have carried a message from Custer to Reno, was a member of Troop G, which was with Reno. Sergeant Robert Hughes who carried Custer's battle-flag and who died beside his commander on the hill, was assigned to K troop which was with Benteen. James Martin, who was Custer's orderly and who took back the last message to Benteen, was a member of H troop. There were undoubtedly a good many others since approximately ninety-one troopers of the five companies who were with Custer, were present at the battle and survived. Some of them were with the pack train, others like

²² O.T. (Wallace) 49.

²³ O.T. (Wallace) 125.

²⁴ Edward J. McLernand, "With the Indians and Buffalo in Montana." *Cavalry Journal*, January and April 1927, Vol. 36, 40.

Watson and Peter Thompson of Troop C were saved when their horses played out before reaching the field of battle. Sergeant Daniel A. Kanipe of Troop C was sent back with a message to the commander of the pack train and Gustave Korn of Troop I started out with Custer's detachment and ended with Reno's. There never has been any very satisfactory explanation of just how the transfer was accomplished.²² These factors, however, will not account for all of the ninety-one and so the question remains, just where were these men and what were they doing while the battle was being fought?

Some of the critics of General Custer have stressed the fact that there were large numbers of recruits in all of the companies, men without adequate training in the arts of the soldier, and have assigned this as at least a contributory cause of the disaster.

Among others, Major Reno testified that there were many recruits in the command²³ and Lieutenant DeRadio said there were many recruits among the members of Reno's battalion and that many of the horses were green.²⁴ Sergeant F. A. Culbertson also testified that most of the men of G company were new while a large part of A troop had not been in the service over five or six months.²⁵ He said that the recruits had been too much on other duty to learn very much about the duties of a soldier, and that many of them had only a month or six weeks of training, while there were a few that he considered unfit to be taken into battle. He added that it was very seldom that one could find so many poor horsemen.²⁶ However, Lieutenant George Wallace rather tempered this testimony by stating that he did not mean to insinuate that the command was inefficient or unreliable because of the number of recruits, but only that a few of them would have been better soldiers if they had received a little more drill.²⁷

Examination of the records, however, fails to reveal that there was any extraordinarily large number of recruits in the Seventh Cavalry at the time of the battle. In October, 1875, some one hundred and fifty new men joined the regiment but of these approximately one half had had prior service and the others would have been in the army better than six months before the regiment

²² William J. Ghent, *Winners of the West*, Feb. 29, 1936.

²³ O.T. (Reno) 1093.

²⁴ O.T. (DeRadio) 426.

²⁵ O.T. (Culbertson) 596-97.

²⁶ O.T. (Culbertson) 606-607.

²⁷ O.T. (Wallace) 122.

left Fort Lincoln on the campaign against the Sioux.²⁷ Until April of 1876, Troops B, G and K had been on duty in the Department of the Gulf. Because of the campaign planned for the summer and because it was desired to make the Custer column as strong as possible, these three companies were, on the 11th day of April, relieved of duty in the South and put en route for Fort Abraham Lincoln. Four days later the Superintendent of the Mounted Recruiting Service was ordered to forward sixty-two recruits to St. Paul where they were to join the three companies as the latter passed through that city en route to their destination. Of the recruits twenty-five were assigned to Company B, nineteen to Company G and eighteen to Company K.²⁸ When the regiment left Fort Lincoln the greater part of these men marched as infantry as far as the mouth of the Powder River where it was expected that the horses could be obtained. That expectation proved to be an illusory one, however, and when Custer left the base camp, the larger share of the non-commissioned staff, and some fifty other troopers were left behind principally for the reason that there were not enough horses to go around. That the great majority of these men would be the more recent recruits who, having little or no training would be of the least value to the regiment, should be fairly obvious. At the battle, Lieutenant Godfrey is said to have had only two recruits in his company out of the eighteen originally assigned to Troop K and one of the closest students of the battle feels that it is extremely doubtful if any of the other companies had very many more than that.²⁹

One of the most fascinating of all the various subjects which are still contentious is that as to whether or not Major Reno was drunk at the time of the battle. Rumors to that effect began to circulate soon after the news of the disaster reached the outside world and have never been entirely proven or disproven. That many of Reno's officers were disgusted with his conduct is beyond doubt and they apparently made some rather frank statements to that effect soon after the arrival of the Terry-Gibbon command. Lieutenant Henry J. Nowlan, who was an officer of the Seventh Cavalry but temporarily assigned to duty with General Terry's staff, heard some of these comments and began making inquiries. The subject was soon a matter of common gossip

²⁷ Edward S. Luce, *Keogh, Comanche and Custer*, (Washington, 1939) Appendix B, has an excellent discussion of the whole subject of recruits in the Seventh Cavalry.

²⁸ *Army and Navy Journal*, April 22, 1876.

²⁹ Wm. J. Ghent, "Varnum, Reno and the Little Big Horn," *Winners of the West*, April 30, 1936.

throughout the regiment. The chief accusation at the Reno Court of Inquiry was made by John Frett who had been a civilian packer with the regiment. He testified that on the evening of the 25th after the firing had ceased he and a companion had gone to the pack train in an attempt to find something to eat. On the way they encountered Major Reno who asked, "Are the mules tight?" Not fully understanding the question, Frett said, "Tight, what do you mean, tight?" To this Reno replied, "Tight, God damn you" and slapped Frett in the face with his hand. Then he took a carbine and leveled it at the packer and threatened to shoot him. Then the companion, B. F. Churchill, pulled Frett back and the two men went away. Under further examination Frett declared that Reno had a bottle of whiskey in his hand and that as he slapped him some of the whiskey spilled over Frett and Reno staggered. Frett insisted that Reno was very drunk, that he staggered and stammered and was soon incapable of walking, that he had to brace himself against one of the packs.⁶⁴ Frett was subjected to a savage and merciless cross-examination by Reno's counsel but despite all attempts to bully him the former packer stuck to his story. In fact, he gave back much more than he received and by all odds had the better of the argument. His testimony was, in large part, substantiated by that of Churchill, who, however, insisted upon referring to Frett as Fritz. His version of the story was that Frett thought Reno meant to ask if the mules were tied and had answered "Yes" when the major repeated the question. He added that Reno made a pass to strike Frett and that some whiskey flew over both of the packers. He also seemed to think that Reno had intended to strike Frett with the carbine rather than to shoot him. In answer to a direct question, he gave it as his opinion that Reno was "a little bit under the influence of whiskey or liquor."⁶⁵

Major Reno's version of the incident was to admit that he had some whiskey which he had obtained from a trader at the mouth of the Rosebud, but he insisted that he was perfectly sober on the night of the 25th and did not take a drink until after midnight. He said that he had gone to the pack train to investigate reports that a great deal of stealing was going on and to drive out soldiers and packers that were skulking there. On this occasion he had noticed that the packs had been taken off and then he had found the two men there. He inquired what they were doing and Frett's reply angered him. Reno admitted that he

⁶⁴ O.T. (Frett) 911-920 *passim*.

⁶⁵ O.T. (Churchill) 826.

struck Frett and also that he might have threatened to shoot him if he found him there agin. He said that he had his flask in his pocket at the time and did not know that there had been any escape of whiskey; if there was, the coat got it. He put the time at between nine and ten o'clock and declared that he did not have a drink until two hours later. The flask was not emptied until the morning of the 28th on the Custer battlefield when the command had gone to bury the dead. The stench was sickening and the sights and smells made Captain Thomas H. French sick to his stomach and he asked Reno for a drink.⁴²

Most of the other officers rallied to Reno's defense. Lieutenant Edward Mathey said that he saw no indication of drunkenness on Reno's part and that no evidence of anything of the kind had ever come to his attention⁴³ although he admitted that in the spring of 1878 he had had an intimation from Girard that Reno had been using liquor while the command was besieged on the hill.⁴⁴ But he did contradict Reno on two points. He said that he saw Reno with a bottle containing a little whiskey on the morning of the 26th.⁴⁵ As to Reno's statement about the packers causing trouble, Mathey said that he had had no trouble and that he remembered of no complaints being made.⁴⁶ Since, however, the packs had not been separated by companies but were all piled together, he admitted that it would have been an easy matter for either packers or soldiers to have helped themselves to rations since there no regular distribution.⁴⁷ Captain Thomas M. McDougall testified that he saw nothing to indicate that Reno was drunk, that he saw no whiskey in the command and that he had never heard any reports that Reno was drunk. Had he been, it would naturally have been found out, in McDougall's opinion.⁴⁸ Lieutenant Wallace⁴⁹ said that he saw no evidence of insobriety on the Major's part but admitted that he did not see Reno at all on the night of the 25th, not from early evening until the next morning and knew nothing of what might have occurred between Reno and any of the packers. But Wallace insisted that he had never heard of any trouble.⁵⁰

⁴² O.T. (Reno) 1081-82.

⁴³ O.T. (Mathey) 950.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 962.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 950.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 940.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 945.

⁴⁸ O.T. (McDougall) 991-92.

⁴⁹ O.T. (Wallace) 1002.

⁵⁰ O.T. (Wallace) 1010.

Captain F. W. Benteen was even more emphatic. He said that he had been with Reno nearly the whole night of the 25th¹¹ and even lay down in his bed¹² and knew definitely that Reno was not drunk. He added that he did not know that Reno had any whiskey or that he (Benteen) would have been after some.¹³ Lieutenant W. S. Edgerly supported Benteen. He testified that he saw Reno about nine o'clock in the evening of the 25th and again about five hours later. On both occasions the Major was perfectly sober and gave no indication that he had been drinking. Edgerly was positive that had Reno been drunk the other officers would not have permitted him to retain command.¹⁴ Godfrey said that Reno had a half-gallon keg of whiskey which he took with him in the field, but added that he did not believe that any other officer sampled its contents.¹⁵ Many years later the Reverend Arthur Edwards claimed that Reno had admitted to him that his strange actions at the battle of the Little Big Horn were due to the fact that he was drunk, but the confession cannot be substantiated.¹⁶ So the question whether Reno was or was not intoxicated remains moot. The officers who testified that he was not may have been actuated by regimental *esprit de corps*, the desire to protect a brother officer or the reputation of the regiment, or they may have been telling the truth. On the other hand neither Frett nor Churchill had any apparent motive for lying and their testimony was not shaken by cross-examination, and, what is more important, it was not answered. But in any event Reno's sobriety or lack of it did not affect the fate of Custer in any way, the Last Stand had been made and lost hours before.

Although legend has it that Captain Myles Keogh's horse, Comanche, was the sole living thing found on the battlefield when the Terry-Gibbon forces arrived, such does not seem to have been the case. Nor is it at all certain that Comanche was found on the battlefield. On the morning of the 27th while examining the site of the great Indian village, the men of Gibbon's command found several Seventh Calvary horses. They had been abandoned by the Indians since all of them were too badly wounded to be of any

¹¹ O.T. (Benteen) 678.

¹² Ibid. 841.

¹³ Ibid. 842-43.

¹⁴ O.T. (Edgerly) 836-38.

¹⁵ Edward S. Godfrey, "Custer's Last Battle," **Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana**, Vol. IX, 210.

¹⁶ Wm. J. Ghent, "Varnum, Reno and the Little Big Horn," **Winners of the West**, April 30, 1936.

value.⁶⁷ Just what happened to them we do not know, but they were probably shot. Also F. F. Girard and Captain Benteen told of finding a wounded horse lying in a pool of mud and water on the right bank of the river a short distance below the ford where it is believed that Custer attempted to cross and attack the Indian village. Hanging on a projecting tree branch nearby were the trousers of an enlisted man. Benteen, who shot the animal on the 28th in order to put it out of its misery, said that it was a white horse.⁶⁸ We know that Lieutenant W. W. Cooke rode an "almost white horse"⁶⁹ and there is some evidence to show that Lieutenant James Calhoun also had a horse of that color.⁷⁰ In this case the animal might have belonged to either of these two officers. But Girard described it as a gray,⁷¹ in which case it could have belonged to any one of a considerable number of people. Troop E was the gray horse troop. The trumpeters rode grays, and the horses belonging to members of the band, which had been left at the mouth of the Powder River, were also grays and had been distributed among the other troops.

Who found Comanche, where and under what circumstances is almost a story in itself. Credit is generally given to Lieutenant Harry Nowlan who was a close friend of Comanche's owner, Captain Myles Keogh. The animal is said to have been discovered standing in a ravine behind where Custer monument now is, half dead from the loss of blood from several wounds.⁷² There are however, several other candidates for the distinction. Gustave Korn, blacksmith of Troop I, claimed that he discovered the horse. Since the animal was wounded in six places it was suggested that it be put out of its misery but to this Korn claims that he refused to agree. Instead, with the help of several other troopers he got Comanche down to the river, bathed and dressed the wounds and got him ready for the trip downstream to where the steamer *Far West* was anchored.⁷³ There are others who declare that the horse

⁶⁷ **The Physicians Handbook, 1876**, contains an unidentified officer's diary, 1876, Custer Campaign, including the Little Big Horn. In the Wm. J. Ghent Papers, Library of Congress. This was clearly the Diary of Lieutenant H. O. Faulding, who was with Gibbon's command.

⁶⁸ O.T. (Benteen) 695.

⁶⁹ Albert J. Partoll, "After the Custer Battle," *Frontier and Midland*, Vol. XIX, 279.

⁷⁰ *Army and Navy Journal*, August 5, 1876. This account is attributed to Custer's Crow Scout, Curly.

⁷¹ *Court*, (Girard), 166.

⁷² Joseph Mills Hanson, *The Conquest of the Missouri*, 296. On the subject of Comanche, see Luce, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

⁷³ *Winners of the West*, January 30, 1936. This account is on the back of a large picture of Comanche and was purportedly written by Korn at Fort Meade, South Dakota, May 21, 1888.

was found, not on the battlefield, but on the site of the Indian village and that the discovery was made by Gibbon's men on the afternoon of the 28th.⁶⁴ Henry Brinkerhoff, of Troop G, later claimed to have discovered the badly wounded horse standing in a clump of trees. On reporting the discovery he was ordered to destroy the animal but on returning to carry out the order, Comanche whinnied and went to him. Ascertaining that none of the wounds were deep, Brinkerhoff claims that he led the animal back to camp.⁶⁵ A further claimant is Captain McDougall who, in a letter to Godfrey, dated May 18, 1909, said that he discovered the animal in the small bushes along the river near the site of the Indian camp. The discovery was made, he claimed, on the 28th, while the members of his troop were searching for additional tools with which to bury the dead of Custer's battalions.⁶⁶ "It is thus evident," as W. J. Ghent wrote, "that the student has a choice among several contestants for the distinction of having found Comanche after the battle of the Little Big Horn."⁶⁷

Another horse problem centers around the fate of Custer's mare "Vic" and here there is another direct conflict of evidence. "Vic" was a sorrel with four white feet and a white blaze on the forehead. Both Lieutenant-Colonel William Walter Edwards⁶⁸ and Lieutenant Edward J. McClernand declare that the body of the horse was found on the battlefield. The latter says that the body was found some one hundred and fifty feet from the knoll where the Custer monument now stands, the head toward the knoll. From the position of the legs the Lieutenant judged that the horse had been traveling rapidly when shot down.⁶⁹ But Godfrey in a letter to E. S. Paxton, dated January 16, 1896, says that "Vic" was not found on the battlefield and that he had been told that the horse had been identified as in the possession of some Indians in the hostile camp.⁷⁰ White Bull, a nephew of Sitting Bull, was later told by one of the sons of Inkpaduta, that a horse in the latter's possession had formerly belonged to the "Long Hair,"⁷¹ the Sioux name for Custer, and the inference is that it was the horse Custer rode at the battle of the Little Big Horn.

⁶⁴ Lieutenant-Colonel W. H. C. Bowen, "Custer's Losing Battle Re-Fought," *Portland Oregonian*, July 20, 1926. Reprinted in **Winners of the West**, September 30, 1926.

⁶⁵ **Winners of the West**, April 30, 1934.

⁶⁶ **Winners of the West**, February 28, 1934.

⁶⁷ **Idem**.

⁶⁸ Lieutenant-Colonel William Walter Edwards, "The Battle of the Little Big Horn," *Outdoor Life*, February, 1933.

⁶⁹ McClernand, *loc. cit.* 54.

⁷⁰ Partoll, *loc. cit.* 277.

⁷¹ Stanley Vestal, *Sitting Bull*, 175.

One other question that has remained unanswered ever since the battle is, "Was there a Custer survivor?" In the twenties and early thirties of the present century scarcely a year passed without someone gaining a degree of temporary notoriety by claiming to be the last survivor of Custer's little band who by some ingenious method had escaped alive from the fatal field, and for some equally ingenious reason had kept his identity a secret for the intervening years. So far as is known no claim was ever substantiated but that did not in the least discourage future claimants although as the battle retreated farther and farther into history the number of men claiming to be the "last survivor" suffered a corresponding decrease.

In August following the battle, Lieutenant Godfrey found what he thought might have been one case of a trooper surviving the slaughter of the Custer fight. A dead horse, shot in the forehead, was found near the junction of Rosebud Creek and the Yellowstone river. It was a sorrel or light bay animal and since it was lying on its left side the advanced stage of decomposition made it impossible to identify the brand. Most of the equipment was there but the saddle-bags were empty. Although Godfrey did not see it he was told that when first discovered the carbine of the rider lay near the animal's body. Most interesting, however, was the fact that strapped to the saddle was the small grain bag with which all members of the Seventh Cavalry had been provided. **The oats in the bag had not been disturbed.**¹² (Black face mine). This last fact furnishes another possibility of a deserter or straggler from the command. The regiment had left the mouth of Rosebud Creek at noon on the 22nd and marched up the valley of that stream. There was a great deal of straggling and the dead horse may have belonged to some trooper, who, intentionally or otherwise, fell far behind and came to the conclusion that the "glory" of Indian fighting was not for him. Who he was or what became of him, whether straggler or lone survivor, is another of the unsolved mysteries of the fight that raged seventy-five years ago on the ridges above the Little Big Horn.

¹² E. A. Brininstool, "Was There a Custer Survivor?", **Hunter-Trader-Trapper**, April, 1922. See also the same author's article "Unwritten Seventh Cavalry History," **Middle Border Bulletin**, Vol. IV, No. 4 Spring, 1945.



Frizzell 63

MARY WRIGHT EDGERTON**By Pauline Rolfe Archibald**

Near the beginning of the nineteenth century many veterans of the Revolutionary War came to settle in the northeastern part of Ohio in the region that afterwards was called the Western Reserve. Among those settlers were Captain John Wright and his two sons, Alpha and Dr. Amos Wright. They bought tracts of land in the little settlement of Tallmadge. There Alpha met Lucy Foster who came from his home state of Connecticut. There they married and raised their large family and on January 21st, 1827 were born twin daughters, Martha and Mary. Alpha Wright was a Puritan by birth and upbringing and doubtless had many of the faults ascribed to the Puritans, but he also had their virtues which were many, despite modern prejudice against them. In him their sternness was leavened by a tolerant and kindly disposition and his household was a happy one. He was fond of reading and was a firm believer in education for boys and girls both, so his children received a better education than was usual in that day.

In those days every home was a factory in itself and every member had his own appointed tasks. Martha and Mary shared in the work of their household. They learned to sew, knit, cook, take care of the sick and to do all the other tasks required of pioneer women. They had sweet voices and both sang in the church choir. They always dressed exactly alike and were often mistaken for one another, much to their delight and they were said to have been very beautiful with ivory complexions, hazel eyes, and brown hair.

The girls attended Oberlin College for some time. Then Martha was married to Homer Carter, a merchant of Tallmadge, and Mary taught school for awhile. Meanwhile a young lawyer, named Sidney Edgerton, had come to nearby Akron. He and Mary were attracted to one another, but their courtship was a stormy one and sounds like an old-fashioned novel. Mary's parents bitterly opposed the match because Sidney was not a church member —a crime in that Puritan community. Mary was heartbroken but met their decision as she usually met trouble — uncomplainingly. However, her health failed rapidly and her parents, becoming greatly alarmed, finally relented and gave their consent.

Mary and Sidney were married in Tallmadge, May 18th, 1849. They proved to be a most devoted couple. Mary's tact and gentle nature smoothed out difficulties and made their home a very pleasant one.

At first they lived in Tallmadge, then moved to Akron where Sidney's law practice was rapidly expanding. Six years later, Sidney bought his father-in-law's farm and they again moved back to Tallmadge where they lived until Sidney was elected to Congress. Meanwhile he drove back and forth the five miles to Akron every day. During Sidney's two terms in Congress, Mary accompanied him to Washington, leaving her children with her relatives.

At the close of Sidney's second term in Congress he was appointed Chief Justice of Idaho Territory and Mary prepared to take her four children on the long trip to Lewiston, the territorial capital. Among the little party were Lucia Darling, a niece of Sidney's who had made their home with them for many years, and Col. W. F. Sanders, a nephew, who had also been a member of their family until his marriage. Col. Sanders brought his wife and two infant sons with him and a few men also joined the party in Cleveland and in Omaha. They crossed the Plains in covered wagons, drawn by oxen, making about twelve miles each day. Finally they reached Snake River early in September. There they were told that it would be unsafe to try to cross the mountains so late in the season so they turned north to the mining camp of Bannack, arriving there about September 13, 1863.

The primitive living conditions existing in mining towns of that area must have been very hard for women to endure, but Mary, like other pioneer women, made the best of what she had. They found a store building situated near Yankee Flat. It had a floor, a large front room, and a small kitchen. They partitioned the front room to make a large living room and two small bedrooms. The house was heated by two stone fireplaces. A small sheet iron stove was used for cooking. Mary tried her best to beautify their house. The walls of the front room were covered with sheets she brought with her, but there were not enough to hide the logs of the other rooms, and no sheeting could be bought at stores that dealt chiefly with miners. The floors were rough, with no carpets. The walls were destitute of pictures. There were few books in the community, and these went the rounds of those who were fond of literature. Newspapers were several weeks old when they reached the camp and magazines were almost unknown.

A school was opened that spring on Yankee Flat near the Edgerton house with Lucia Darling as teacher. There were fewer than twenty pupils. Before a building could be found, school was held in the front room of her uncle's house. That front room was also used as a bedroom, had one corner curtained off for an office for Sidney. Truly a room of many uses!

Mary must have worried greatly when her husband was sent to Washington to engineer the scheme to divide the Territory, giving the proposed new territory of Montana its present boundaries. He left Bannack early in January, 1864. The stage could not run then because of the depth of the snow, so Sidney had to ride horseback as far as Salt Lake City. During his absence a baby girl was born to them in May, just three days before Montana became a territory. She received the name of Idaho. Sidney returned in July, having secured the division of the territory; the formation of Montana; and the placing of the western boundary line on the Coeur d'Alene, instead of on the Continental Divide, as was first suggested.

Mary never complained, but in a letter to her mother, written about this time, she speaks of being "so lonely," as she might well have been with her husband so far away, a strange doctor, a poor nurse, and absolutely no conveniences.

In the fall of 1865 the family returned to Ohio. Mary was glad to be with her family and friends again and the children needed to be in school, the oldest having reached the age of sixteen. Sidney bought a house in Akron and resumed the practice of law. Mary visited Montana once, in 1882. Her eldest daughter, Martha (my mother) was living at Ft. Benton at that time where her husband, H. P. Rolfe, was practicing law. Mary was the mother of nine children, two of whom died in infancy. Two of her daughters are still living. One of them, Idaho (Mrs. George Buckingham) lives with a daughter in Madison, Ohio; the other, Nina (Mrs. Walter M. Whitman) lives in Walpole, Massachusetts. Martha came to Montana in 1876 with her husband, H. P. Rolfe, and lived here until her death in 1936.

Mary died in Akron, Ohio, August 4, 1864. The Ft. Benton "River Press" in a notice of her death says "Mrs. Edgerton was a lady of great culture and refinement and combined those qualities which endeared her to everyone with whom she associated. Many of the old miners will remember her for the kindly interest she had in their welfare."



SMOKE SIGNALS

By Bob Fletcher

Interest is growing on both sides of the border in a plan to mark the route of the old Whoop-up Trail between Fort Benton, Montana, and the site of old Fort McLeod, Alberta. Guy Weadick, for many years manager of the Calgary Stampede, is pushing the project from the Canadian end and the Montana Highway Commission as well as residents in the vicinity of Fort Benton are considering marking this end of the trail.

Until the coming of the railroads to Montana, carrying goods by wagon train was a business of enormous proportions. Most of the freight that came up the river to Fort Benton was carried inland from that steamboat terminal by the competing Block P and Diamond R outfits. The Block P was owned by T. C. Power & Brother. The Diamond R was organized in 1865 by Nick Wall and John Roe, steamboat captains. Three years later Colonel Charles A. Broadwater, Matt Carroll, E. G. Maclay and George Steele took it over and ran trains between all points in the Northwest and as far south as Utah. The Whoop-up Trail to Canada came in for its share of the traffic. Before competition cut the rate the Diamond R got ten cents per pound for a haul of one hundred miles or less. With a load of five tons to a team and with twenty-five teams to a train, the gross receipts were magnificent.

Wagon freighting became a highly specialized industry that developed new techniques in the West. It took skill to drive six head of mules or horses with check reins while handling whip and brakes on mountain roads that were no more than wagon tracks. So did skinning a jerkline team of five to eight spans. The artful manipulation of whip, line and vocabulary by the Skinner, combined with the intelligence and horse sense of his team, was a beautiful display of synchronized effort. When the tinkle of the chime bells swinging on an arch between the leaders' hames announced the approach of a train, every soul in a settlement turned out to welcome it.

Oxen were used, also, and had their commercial advantages. They required no expensive harness . . . just chains and a yoke with hickory bows. Indians didn't covet work cattle, which at the end of their usefulness as draft animals could be fattened and

slaughtered for tolerably tough beef. The bull whacker is as extinct as the dodo.

Louis Heitman, prominent old timer of Helena, Diamond City and White Sulphur Springs, accompanied such an outfit from Corinne, Utah, to Helena in the early Seventies. Louis was a German boy seeking adventure in the Wild West. Hearing of Montana's gold fields he made a dicker with a freighter to work his passage north. Louis used to declare that when he left Corinne he couldn't speak a word of English, but arrived in Helena talking it quite fluently. By listening to the freighter he had learned three phrases the mildest of which would sear the grass within a radius of thirty yards. There is no denying the superiority of motor trucks on paved highways when it comes to transporting huge loads long distances in fast time, but they aren't as picturesque by any means, though the drivers' language remains about the same.

* * *

Not only is it well to mark old trails in Montana but more consideration could be given to the preservation of historic sites and buildings. The Sun River Valley Post of the American Legion is setting a fine example by trying to persuade their local School Board to reconsider its plans to raze the old structures at Fort Shaw. If the Board relents the Legionnaires undoubtedly will want to go one step further and provide a program of restoration that will rehabilitate the old military outpost.

* * *

When John Survant crossed the Great Divide this summer, some of the boys up on the Hi-line began to realize that top hands who used to ride for old time Montana cattle spreads were getting scarce. Paul Campbell, Dick Nelson and John David of Glasgow and vicinity decided to ride circle and see how many old waddies they could flush out of the neighboring breaks and coulees for a gathering July 1st, at the Nelson-David horse camp between Glasgow and Hinsdale. They thought between forty and fifty would be a good record. The old silvertips could sit around the tailgate of a chuck wagon and auger while they consumed beef and bottled goods. It would be the last roundup of as fine a parcel of cowhands as ever picked a hair brand on a sleeper.

As a nice, hospitable gesture the hosts sent printed invitations to distant ranges. When they began getting acceptances from as far away as southern California they arranged to barbecue another steer or two. On the big day an endless caravan of cars winding across the benchland raised a smoke that could be seen

past the Larb Hills and up in Canada. Two hundred and thirty-two bona fide old timers who rode for famous Montana irons in the days of the open range were tallied and ear marked. All of them had been Montana residents for over fifty years. Between three and four thousand additional and more or less unexpected guests arrived to join the powwow.

Dean of them all in length of residence and range experience was Charley Stuart, 84, of Brusette. Born at Gerhard, Montana, in 1867, Charles Stuart is the son of Granville Stuart, prospector, vigilante and pioneer cattleman. As a young man Charley rode for the DHS, Circle Diamond, Long X and Square brands. His memory is excellent, his sense of humor is keen and his colorful anecdotes of early Montana are legion. Louis De Bray, 'Letch' Lemon, 'Slippers' Prestidge, Bill Cherry, Ambrose Cheney, Bill Armington and dozens of other riders of the grass country were there. Calf branding and stud roping furnished diversion for the spectators but the real theme of this momentous last roundup was "Remember when?"

The event was covered by LIFE writer, Ed Ogle, and cameraman, Carl Iwasaki. The story appeared in the July 30th issue of the magazine.

* * *

On July 25th and 26th several thousand people gathered in the valley of the Little Bighorn on the Crow Indian reservation to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the battle between the 7th U. S. Cavalry commanded by Lieutenant Colonel George Custer and the Sioux and Cheyenne Indians under their war chiefs, Gall, Crazy Horse and Two Moons. Among the military men at the observance were Admiral William D. Leahy, former Chief of Staff; Lieutenant General Albert C. Wedemeyer, Commander Sixth Army; Major General Gilbert Cook, retired; Major General Hugo P. Rush of the Air Force; and Brigadier General Lawson H. M. Sanderson of the Marine Air Arm. They were welcomed by United States Senator Zales N. Ecton, Congressman W. A. D'Ewart and Governor John W. Bonner.

Three eye-witness survivors of the battle were present. They were Charles Settinman, Daniel Old Bull and Sadie White Man, who were children in the Northern Cheyenne camp when the fight occurred. They saw the dust and smoke laden day of horror and stark tragedy for the whites. Divided, misinformed, confused and outnumbered, Custer's command had fought valiantly. Instead of routing a dismayed band of unorganized, poorly equipped Indians as he expected, he had been surrounded by a horde of incensed

braves who fought with determination and courage to avenge sore wrongs and to protect their squaws and children.

The valley of the Little Big Horn now drowses in peace undisturbed by war cry and rifle fire. Travelers course its length by rail and highway. The railroad siding of Gerryowen commemorates the battle tune of the gallant 7th Cavalry. On the far hills to the east, white markers indicate the spots where soldiers fell and a stone monument has been placed where George Custer, the man of staunch admirers and bitter critics, played his last flaming role. Remnants of the Sioux now live on their Standing Rock Reservation in South Dakota, while their beloved Black Hills have been turned over to mining and tourist interests. The Northern Cheyenne still brood over their wrongs on their Tongue River Reservation just twenty-five miles east of the site of their great victory. Perhaps the day rightfully belonged to the Indians.

* * *

Anticipating the building of a proposed dam by the U. S. Bureau of Reclamation that will flood the magnificent canyon of the Big Horn River on the Crow Indian Reservation, a party which included two archaeologists from the Smithsonian Institute, has explored the gorge for archaeological sites. They disembarked at Big Horn bridge on July 25th after locating 20 ancient camp sites and villages which flourished several thousand years ago as well as hunting camps occupied within the last decade.

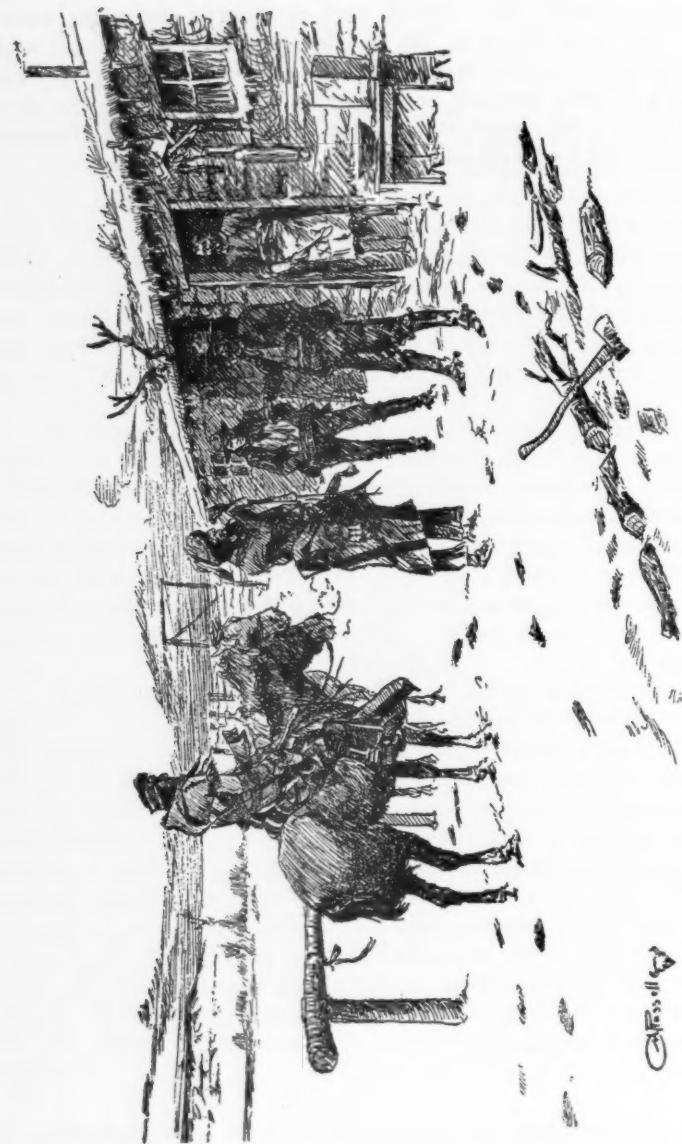
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Another scientific project is being carried on near the site of old Montana City on Prickley Pear Creek east of Helena. Anthropologists from Columbia University are excavating under the direction of Richard Forbis, formerly of Missoula and now completing work for his Ph. D. at Columbia University. Montana's first families have their own theory concerning their creation and length of residence in America, but anthropologists are skeptical and give small credence to their earnest assertions that their tribe stemmed from a beaver or a buffalo who emerged from a hole in the ground. The Forbis party is finding the usual collection of stone scrapers, awls and points left or lost by the primitive villagers. Helena laymen who have visited the diggings are prone to say, "What, no mastodon tusks, no dinosaur eggs, no Piltdown men?"

* * *

The leatherette cover on this issue of the magazine calls attention to Montana's cattle industry. It's been big business in this state for a long time. The "Day of the Cattleman" as pie-

tured in E. S. Osgood's classic book may be over. The true range cattle industry may, indeed, have gone down under the snows of the "hard winter of '86-'87", but the cattlemen are still with us and there's still a range. Methods have changed, true. It's not such a lonely business now. But as you drive across the state it doesn't take much imagination to see "cattle on a thousand hills" and horsemen on the rim of the sky.



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BOOK REVIEWS

THE OFFICIAL RECORD OF THE RENO COURT OF INQUIRY,
edited by Col. W. A. Graham, U.S.A., Ret'd, (Pacific Palisades,
1951) 575 pp.

Two and a half years elapsed before any searching and official investigation of the battle of the Little Big Horn was made. In the meantime so many distorted versions of the event had been imposed upon the American public that necessity for such an investigation became apparent. The authorities at Washington, who deemed it wise to let sleeping dogs lie, and had done but little to bring the truth to light, discovered in 1878 that as to the Little Big Horn, there were no sleeping dogs.

Custer and his dead slept well; their duty done. But not so his friends and partisans, who almost from the moment "the Yellow Hair" was stricken down by Indian bullets, pointed the finger of scorn and accusation at his second in command, Major Marcus A. Reno.

Custer was a hero. For every hero there must be a villain, and Reno was selected for the role. And thus it transpired that because partisans of the dead leader persistently strove to fasten upon him not only responsibility for Custer's tragic fate, but culpability as well, Reno at long last turned at bay, and demanded that he be either exonerated or condemned by the verdict of a Court of Inquiry.

A Court of Inquiry is an investigatory body. It hears evidence under oath, finds facts and makes recommendations as to future action. It is not a Court-Martial; it tries no charges and imposes no penalties. Its one purpose is to establish the truth.

Major Reno stood accused; not before the bar of military justice, but before the bar of public opinion. In an open letter to Wyoming's delegate to Congress, broadcast by the press throughout the Nation, Frederick Whittaker, Custer's first (and worst) biographer, charged Reno with cowardly failure to go to Custer's rescue; and he urged Congressional investigation, in which demand the Major joined. Congress stalled, and thereupon Reno appealed to the President for a Court of Inquiry to the end that all doubts as to his conduct be set at rest.

The Court met at Chicago, 13 January, 1879. Few inquiries have been more thorough. Twenty-three witnesses took the stand, each being interrogated at length by the Recorder and by Major

Reno's counsel, Mr. Gilbert. All but two of the surviving officers of the regiment were called and examined, and representative non-commissioned officers and enlisted men as well. In addition to these, civilian scouts, interpreters and packers gave their testimony, as did also Colonel Gibbon, who commanded the relief column, and Colonel Sheridan who reinterred the dead in 1877.

The record of this Court of Inquiry, the original of which comprises some 1300 pages, has for seventy-two years been inaccessible to the public, being classified as a restricted document. Late last year, however, the writer was authorized by the Archivist of the United States, to whose custody the original record was committed in 1941, and by The Judge Advocate General and The Adjutant General of the Army, to publish this record in full, complete and unexpurgated form; and a strictly limited edition, preceded by an introductory chapter, with revised indices, and all exhibits fully reproduced, is now available to libraries, researchers and students of western history.

The record sets forth in minute detail all that was known by the men who were there and participated in the combat, of the manner in which the battle was fought. The testimony follows the 7th Cavalry from the time of its departure from the camp on the Yellowstone on June 22, 1876, throughout its marches and its movements in action and bivouac, until the relief of its surviving remmnannt by General Terry on the 26th. It presents to the discriminating reader, the clearest picture ever drawn of Reno's fight in the valley, his precipitate retreat to the hills across the river, and his attempted advance to the north, where Custer and his men fought to the death the vengeful Sioux. It describes his siege by thousands of encircling warriors; it paints with master strokes the heroic conduct of the silver-haired war-horse Benteen, and the desperate dashes of volunteers to obtain water for the parched throats of the wounded. It tells of Reno's alleged drunkenness during the night of the 25th, and of the night-long vigil kept by officers, that exhausted men might get some rest. It is the detailed story of an epic defense against overwhelming odds; a fight to the finish with death at savage hands the one alternative; and it is the story, too, of a stricken field of battle, where none but the dead remained, mutely to tell by the placement of their naked bodies, how Custer and his men had fought and died. It is a record of which not alone the Seventh Cavalry, but the United States Army, may well be proud, for it shows, notwithstanding it records disaster and defeat, the valor and resourcefulness of the American soldier. It is a record whose careful

study cannot fail to impress upon the student, the researcher, the historian, the battle of the Little Big Horn as it was; told graphically by the only men who knew.

The Court's verdict exonerated Major Reno. Some there are who still question its findings; but none can read this record and disagree with its conclusions.

W. A. Graham

Pacific Palisades, California.

CHARLES M. RUSSELL — Biography by Ramon F. Adams and Homer E. Britzman, (Trails End Publishing Co., Pasadena, 1948) 327 pp.

This biography, if it may be called such, will warm the hearts of those who "rode the range" with Russell, and the sons and daughters of those who "ate out of the same frying pan" with Charlie.

In a two-volume work, Mr. Adams and Mr. Britzman have presented an inventory of the Russell art in one volume, and in the other a collection of stories about and by Russell arranged chronologically from his St. Louis birth in 1864 to his Montana death in 1926.

The books seem to aim primarily at presenting Russell as a man and as a painter. As a man, he is characterized as a lovable, kind individual with a lot of "horse sense." As a painter, he is in so many words, described as a genius. Those conclusions by the authors are interspersed in a periodic manner. In the author's comment, they struggle with the alloyage of Charlie Russell as an ordinary average man and Charlie Russell as a genius. They have trouble with the commixion of Charlie Russell as a saint and Charlie Russell as a sinner. They have apologized for his so-called "weaknesses," and rationalized his actions in order, it would seem, to please those who cannot take Charlie Russell as he was.

The most fascinating feature of the two-volume work is the many reprints of Russell art and the many photographs of the painter and his friends. These, together with the Russell yarns, will make an enjoyable if not an informative evening.

Peter Meloy

Helena.

RAW COUNTRY, By L. A. Nutting, with contributions by B. F. and Mrs. Mary Lamb. (Privately printed, Laurel, Mont., 1948) 41 pp.

Subtitled "Recollection of the West During Ninety Years", the text is mainly devoted to the early-day adventures of L. A. Nutting and B. F. Lamb, Laurel pioneers. Of especial interest to students in Montana history are the items relating to the buffalo hunters, whose activities resulted in the destruction of the great herds which disappeared during the early years of the 1880's.

It is publications such as these which preserve the flavor of a day gone forever, and serve as a foundation for those who write more formal history and those who write historical fiction which strengthens itself with an authentic background. "Raw Country" details some of the lesser-known aspects of life on the frontier, as seen and remembered by men still living.

Eric Thane

Helena.

HERITAGE OF CONFLICT: LABOR RELATIONS IN THE NONFERROUS METALS INDUSTRY UP TO 1930. By Vernon H. Jensen. (Cornell University Press, 1950.) 495 pp.

Both the title and Jensen's thesis that "conflict breeds conflict" prepare the reader for the subject of this book. The whole pattern of early miner-management relations in the Rockies and Great Basin area carries out the tragic story. Psychology more than purely economic factors played a determining role in union history before 1930.

The author sketches the human and industrial background of the regions and activities in a way calculated to show the development of a distinct class of laboring miners set apart from owners and managers and soon possessed of definite and peculiar occupational and economic problems and ways of thinking. After 1890 serious troubles appeared in Leadville, Colorado; the Coeur d'Alenes; Cripple Creek and Telluride, Colorado; Goldfield, Nevada; Bingham, Utah; Butte, and southern Arizona.

While chronologically nearly a half century elapsed, areas differed in circumstances, metals, and mining methods, but the same larger misunderstandings usually cropped up. The organization of the Western Federation of Miners, born of the Butte local, was a recognition on the workers' part of a permanent separation of labor and management. Perhaps a more dangerous schism was that between the W. F. M. and the I. W. W. The latter radical organization, ever following a "rule or ruin" policy, attempted to dominate Western unionism with its socialistic and class warfare principles. In numerous efforts to crush the W. F. M. and other regular groups the I. W. W., often spoke and

acted as did the most reactionary mine operators. The owners sometimes used these Wobblies to divide and conquer unionism, or accused sincere labor leaders with legitimate grievances of being dangerous radicals. Another management strategem described by Jensen was to organize mine owners' associations and citizens' alliances to advocate back-to-work movements or act as armed "protective" bands. Although the calling out of state militias and appeals for federal troops were not monopolies of Western owners, these means helped destroy several unions in the Rockies, where government was generally antagonistic toward the unions.

Among immediate desires, miners wanted the eight-hour day, in some places achieved by law and personal political ambitions, an end to the card systems and "rustling cards," and discrimination against unionism, and wages to keep pace with prices. More basic issues, the author shows, were a feeling of insecurity among workers, and a lack of respect on the part of management which insisted upon paternalism. The I. W. W.'s malevolent influence, he feels, was not fundamental, but a final blow. Unlike more eastern areas, there was no outstanding moderating influence to reveal slanders and check bitterness. A notable exception was the successful mediation commission of 1917 sent to southern Arizona by Woodrow Wilson.

Although the greater factors are presented and analyzed, much mystery still exists about individual developments and attitudes. The author does not offer much new information about the origin of many violent incidents, for new facts are often impossible to obtain and conjecture shaky. He does, however, give much narrative detail on the history of various disputes, and his book is, to a large degree, the story of the rise and fall of the Western Federation of Miners, later the I. U. M. M. S. W.

The student of Montana history will find good material to interest him. Butte, the "Gibraltar of Unionism," early a numerical and financial giant in this respect, appears as an organizational hub, its wage scale a measure for other camps until the local union was crushed in 1914. The area's rather unique union growth during the "War of the Copper Kings" is clearly demonstrated and the downfall explained, despite the exceedingly confused situations.

Thus, by the 1920's, fear, insecurity, and anger were the main springs of labor relations, not the indispensable trinity which Vernon Jensen sees as basic for industrial as well as union

progress — mutual respect, humane living, and business-like behavior.

John E. Baur

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POWELL OF THE COLORADO. By William Culp Darrah. (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1951.) 426 pp.

There is a type of career in which a single dramatic exploit, such as Lindbergh's transatlantic flight, outshines all the rest of a man's life. John Wesley Powell performed such a feat. In 1869, he went down the Colorado River, starting at the Pacific Railroad crossing of the Green River in present-day Wyoming, passing through rapids and gorges, roping his boats down the more dangerous falls, and threading the Grand Canyon to placid waters at the mouth of the Virgin.

This was a great adventure. It had danger aplenty. Not only was the uncharted white water of the Colorado an awesome threat, but the whole country it passed through was unexplored and its Indians potentially hostile. Three members of the expedition who despaired of completing the river passage climbed up to the rim and were killed by the usually placid Shebits. Yet in this descent of the Colorado, and in his second voyage on these boisterous waters, Powell sought more than adventure. His major purpose was scientific. What he aimed to do was to explore this part of the West and particularly to examine the geological sections so magnificently exposed in the canyons of the Colorado. Furthermore, although the journey was as exciting as any in the annals of the West, and although it is the most widely heralded episode in Powell's career, it actually is but one of several for which he deserves enduring fame.

As a youth in the Midwest, Powell worked at farming and schoolteaching but mostly at trying to gain the learning he so much desired. Promptly on the outbreak of the Civil War he volunteered, quickly rose to officer rank in an artillery unit, and at the battle of Shiloh had his right arm shattered by an enemy shot. After gangrene and amputation he returned to active duty in the Army. College teaching followed, along with popular lecturing, field trips to collect museum specimens, and much lobbying for the promotion of scientific work. After his spectacular Colorado trips he concentrated on persuading the federal government to do something more tangible for the advancement of science.

His principle achievement was the establishment of the Geological Survey. Clarence King, its first chief, was his selection.

Powell then took over, greatly expanded the work, gave its topographical phase nation-wide scope, and added other branches, notably the hydrographic program. He was likewise the father and the first head of the Bureau of American Ethnology. He started its studies of Indian languages and culture and set up its series of highly significant publications. An early exponent of irrigation and of federal leadership in such projects, Powell at the same time was a sharp critic of the wishful thinking that beset so many of the schemes for farming the arid West. He was a realist, and he gave the needed breadth to the conservation program.

So energetic a character requires an agile and industrious biographer. William Culp Darrah has gone through a great mass of materials and sees them in proper perspective. Having dealt at length with the Colorado expeditions in the publications of the Utah Historical Society, he does not overemphasize them here. The Powell that emerges is a dynamo of energy, something of a martinet, a genius at promoting and at persuading government officials, but sometimes losing the support of his fellows because he did not deign to explain his aims and methods. Thus his teaching colleagues did not fully appreciate him, nor did a number of his fellow travelers on the Colorado, nor did some of his later associates in Washington. Despite this quirk of character, he was a great formative power in the America of his day, a tremendous asset to American science, and a several-way contributor to the development of the entire West, Montana included. In writing about him Darrah has put in the scientific facts without sacrificing the moving, engaging account of an able, determined, and resourceful character, important to our national development and particularly to that of the West.

John W. Caughey

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AMERICA'S NEW FRONTIER: THE MOUNTAIN WEST.

By Morris E. Garnsey. (Alfred A. Knopf, 1950.) 314 pp.

If wishful thinking and statistics can turn the trick here is a book which will save the west —or part of it, anyhow.

Few will quarrel with Professor Garnsey's thesis that the West is, in some respects, in need of saving, but a proposal for saving it without even a mention of the federal system will raise a good many eyebrows. After perusing his record of colonial exploitation and abuse, and then turning to his solution, one might

say of Garnsey what was said of Henry George: He tells us everything about Paradise except how to achieve it.

The author thinks the politico-economic problem can be solved by the development of an "indigenous" kind of regionalism. It has to be indigenous, otherwise it will fall victim to bureaucracy or pork barrelism. However, "a program of this magnitude would involve a tremendous expansion in the previous volume of investment in the Mountain States." But where is the capital to come from? We aren't told, but it will obviously come from outside the region and probably from the federal government. Of the twelve methods by which this program can be achieved, the author lists no less than eleven which only the federal government could promote and supervise.

Garnsey calls for revival of the frontier spirit of the west. But such a spirit was hardly compatible with regionalism. It was essentially a spirit of laissez faire. You don't find "regional authorities" on that spirit.

To the present reviewer, at least, there is a fog in the hinterland between Garnsey's economics, history and political philosophy. But his book is one that will interest westerners. It points up a problem that needs pointing up.

John W. Smurr

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PAGEANT IN THE WILDERNESS: The Story of the Escalante Expedition to the Interior Basin, 1776. By Herbert E. Bolton. (*Utah Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XVIII, No.'s. 1-4, Salt Lake City, Utah; Utah State Historical Society, 1950.) 265 pp.

In a departure from what may be regarded as the normal procedure for historical quarterlies, the Utah State Historical Society has chosen to present as its 1950 offering a single publication instead of the customary four. The decision appears to have been a wise one in terms of worthwhile contributions to historical publication, inasmuch as Herbert E. Bolton's **Pageant in the Wilderness** must undoubtedly be placed in this category.

Beginning with the establishment of San Diego in Alta California in 1769, the Spanish crown achieved its centuries-long objective of permanent settlements on this part of the Pacific Coast. Within a decade, a string of pueblos and missions stretched northward to San Francisco, with the provincial capital located at Monterey. These settlements, however, were established and supported by sea, giving their existence a certain tenuousness. What

was needed was an overland route whereby to assure the permanence of this newest Spanish province.

It was in an effort to find this overland passage that Fray Silvestre Velez de Escalante, a Franciscan, made his memorable journey in 1776. His famous contemporary and fellow Franciscan, who also acted as explorer and trail-blazer, was Fray Francisco Garces. While Garces sought to discover and open a route from Arizona to Monterey via Yuma, the Colorado River, and Needles, California, Escalante searched for a trail leading northward from New Mexico through Colorado and thence westward across Utah.

In *Pageant in the Wilderness*, Dr. Bolton offers his translation and interpretation of Escalante's day-by-day account of his adventures on this long trek. The title, descriptive and colorful, is a worthy addition to the imposing list of similar Bolton studies, such as *Rim of Christendom*, *The Padre on Horseback*, and *Outpost of Empire*. The similarity does not end with the title, inasmuch as the other hallmarks of Bolton work are present — careful and clever writing, enthusiasm for the topic, and a sure knowledge of the men, places and events under consideration. Also in keeping with tradition is the fact that Professor Bolton personally traveled along with the entire Escalante route as a part of his preparation for writing.

The work consist of two major divisions. First is the excellent one hundred twenty-seven page historical introduction by Dr. Bolton, followed by the translation of Escalante's diary and intinerary comprising just over one hundred pages. Two very fine maps as well as numerous illustrations are included. The merit of the work can perhaps best be indicated by borrowing from the preface written by A. R. Mortenson in which he says, "Despite Bolton's own statement that 'there never was and never will be a definitive monograph,' this Society feels that the present study very nearly approaches the ideal and final word."

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